



Don't Be Guilty of These Errors in Vaccine Storage and Handling



Watch out for these frequent errors in vaccine storage and handling.

ERROR 1: Having only one person responsible for storage and handling of vaccines.

Train at least one back-up person in proper vaccine storage and handling. The back-up should be familiar with all aspects of vaccine storage and handling, including knowing how to handle vaccines when they arrive, how to properly record refrigerator and freezer temperatures, and what to do in case of an equipment problem, power outage, or evacuation.

ERROR 2: Recording temperatures only once per day.

Temperatures in the refrigerator and freezer should be checked at the beginning and end of the clinic day to check for temperatures outside of the acceptable range.

ERROR 3: Recording temperatures for only the refrigerator or freezer.

If your facility administers varicella vaccine, you should have thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer, and record temperatures twice daily for both compartments. Buy certified thermometers that will last for years.

ERROR 4: Documenting out-of-range temperatures on vaccine temperature logs and not taking action.

Documenting temperatures is not enough. Out-of-range temperatures require action. Notify your supervisor when you have an out-of-range temperature. Safeguard your vaccines by moving them to another location and then determine if they are still viable. Check the condition of the unit for problems. After you make an adjustment, document the date, time, temperature, what the problem was, the action you took, and the results of this action. Recheck the temperature every two hours. Call maintenance or a repair person if the temperature remains out of range. Common problems are loose seals, lint or dust covered coils, and temperature controls knocked out of position.

ERROR 5: Throwing away temperature logs at the end of every month.

For monitoring purposes, it is important that temperature logs are kept for at least three years. As the refrigerator ages, you can track recurring problems. If temperatures have been documented out of range, you can determine how long this has been happening and take appropriate action. It's also important to show the need for a new refrigerator.

ERROR 6: Storing vaccine in the wrong part of the refrigerator.

Do not store vaccines in the vegetable bin, the door, bottom, or near the cold air outlet from the freezer. The temperature in these areas will be different than the temperature in the body of the refrigerator. Always place vaccines on the shelves so that air can circulate around the packages. Labeled containers used to organize vaccines should allow for air circulation and vaccines should be in their original packaging.

ERROR 7: Storing frozen vaccine in a dorm-style refrigerator.

Varicella must be stored in a freezer that has its own external door, separate from the refrigerator. No matter how hard you try to adjust the temperature to 5° F in a dorm-style freezer, you won't be able to reach this 5° F, and you'll likely freeze the rest of your vaccines in the refrigerator!

ERROR 8: Leaving the refrigerator or freezer door open or having inadequate seals.

Be sure both doors are closed tightly after every use. Check the seals on the doors on a regular schedule. If there is any indication a door seal may be cracked or not sealing properly, have it replaced. The cost of replacing a seal is much less than replacing a box of vaccine.

ERROR 9: Discarding multi-dose vials 30 days after they are opened.

Don't discard your vaccines prematurely. Almost all multi-dose vials of vaccine have preservatives in them and can be used until the expiration date on the vial, unless there is visible contamination. However, you must discard vials of reconstituted vaccine if they are not used within a defined period after reconstitution. Refer to the vaccine package inserts for additional information. Record the date you reconstitute a multi-dose vaccine on the vial.

ERROR 10: Not having emergency plans for a power outage or natural disaster.

Every clinic should have a written Disaster Recovery Plan that identifies a refrigerator and freezer with a back-up generator in which to store vaccine in the event of a power outage or natural disaster. Consider contacting a local hospital or similar facility as a back-up location.

